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ABSTRACT

In this paper, a statement of concern about short-term thinking by child care professionals is followed by a discussion of long-term planning for the future of day care. It is argued that day care policy should be made by those who best understand the strengths and weaknesses of the profession: providers and parents. Providers and parents should be in a position to act on issues instead of reacting to the actions of others. A review of central aspects of the history of family day care in the 1970s and 1980s is followed by a critical exploration of three models of professionalism: (1) the medical-legal model; (2) the sports model; and (3) the organization model. It is concluded that available models of professionalism may be inappropriate for the professional development of family day care providers, and that members of the profession may have to create and name their own model. Potential components of such a cooperative and humanistic model are delineated. (RH)

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# KEEPING THE FAMILY IN FAMILY DAY CARE

**Speech Delivered at the Annual Meeting of The National Association for Family Day Care, San Mateo, California August 4, 1989**
**By June Solnit Sale, UCLA Child Care Services**

Lately I have become aware of how often we focus on short-term rather than long-range goals. It seems much easier to concentrate on the immediate problem now, find a solution that works and then get on with it. Reading the business section of any newspaper shows that the short term responses are winning over long term planning. When I read about corporate take overs where one large company takes over another corporation which doesn't want to be bought out, I wonder how this affects you and me, how this affects our country? Should we be worried if Paramount wants to buy Time, if Phillip Morris cigarettes wants to make a leveraged buy out of Oreos, or if Eastern Airlines takes over Western?

Some economists and planners are warning that these buy outs do have long term consequences for us and for our country: loss of basic resources, less industry in the future, fewer jobs and consequently less ability to compete with other industrialized countries. The folks that are taking over are committed to immediate profits, are not interested in investing in modernizing plants and equipment, and have little interest in maintaining and upgrading the work

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force. The future is now. Delayed gratification is a message they seem to have missed.

What does this report from the business sector have to do with child care and family day care in particular? This approach to problem-solving by large corporations affects us all and certainly gives us pause to think about our own problem solving techniques. I am aware of no leveraged buy-outs of family day care although recent statistics show that over the past 20 years the largest area of growth in child care has been in center care (from 6% in 1965 to 23% in 1985), and in regulated family day care over the same period from 16% to 22% (with a 1% decrease from 1982 to 1985)(1), indicating that infants are being placed in centers at a rapidly growing rate. I am concerned about short-term thinking that may affect us all now that child care has been recognized nationally as a vital service. Everyone from politicians to employers is talking about it; from yuppies to those on welfare; from nurses to ship yard workers. And while their concern may be positive, they may also want a quick solution, with little or no concern for the future.

It is about long-term, future planning that I would like to talk with you today. To start this conversation, I was reminded of some words of wisdom from Mary Catherine Bateson from an appearance on Bill Moyers' World of Ideas(2). She is an anthropologist, a mother , a wife and an author. She is currently working on a book called

COMPOSING A LIFE and the theme is how women make order and sense out of their conflicting commitments. This is a topic we can all relate to, and no doubt a book some of us have thought of writing.

Bateson says:

> .....one of the problems I think in this society, is that the things that work in the short term don't work in the long term. There's a sort of parable I like to use for this. You've probably heard of the Iditarod, which is this sled dog race across Alaska, it's more than a thousand miles of somebody driving a sled pulled by dogs. It lasts nearly two weeks; it is a long haul, as races go. And for the last three years it's been won by a woman named Susan Butcher. And you ask the question, how is it that she has won? Now, I've never talked to her, I've just read what she's said in the papers. But the answer is that whereas her chief competitor starts his dogs early and drives them hard, they get tired at the end of the day. So every day he forges ahead of her, and at the end of the day his dogs are getting tired, and she's catching up. She wins the race essentially by not exploiting her dogs, by not exhausting them. Now if the race only lasted two days, he would always win; if the race lasted a week, he would always win. The race is long enough so that the caring and protection that she lavishes on her dogs turns into a winning strategy.
>
> Now, you see, we've organized our society so that the winning strategies are the short-term ones. We have taught ourselves not to think in terms of the long haul. But the long haul is what lies between now and a decent life for our grandchildren. Sometimes I think.....that it may be helpful as more women come into full participation at higher policy levels--and they are not there yet--that we may get more of this kind of long-term thinking.

Bateson goes on to discuss how long term strategies may be developed by describing the need for generalists, people who can balance many interests and know how to work them into a complex situation. It seemed to me she beautifully described what family day care providers have been doing through the ages:

> There is a sense in which women have retained the capacity to be generalists, the capacity to live in an ecology in which there is more than one life, more than one form of adaptation, and you have to balance them off. Whereas far too many men.....have been narrowed to caring for only one thing. But what if the health of the world depends on the same kind of capacity that allows you to see while you're feeding one child, that the other child is reaching out and about to pull a cooking pot of hot liquid on his head, and you whip around? This capacity to see out of the corner of your eye, and care about the health not just of one child but of three or four and the husband the other members of the family. That is the beginning of the capacity to care about the health of a multitude of nations, or an environment of many species.

As family day care becomes more prominent and recognized, its future may be changed and molded. The time may be ripe for a take over. I believe that it is important that providers and parents do the molding, that future policy be determined by those who best understand the strengths and weaknesses of this service. It is only a matter of time before there will be national child care legislation and

with it will come more recognition and scrutiny of family day care. No doubt there will be greater demands for standards and regulations. It is vital that you prepare for the future so that you are able to act, instead of react. What you plan for your long term goals will have a great effect on you and generations to come. It will require that you keep your eye on the legislative pot, while making sure that no one is pulling over another pot of impractical ideas on a program that has worked well since the cave woman and man.

I would like to raise some issues and some of my concerns about future directions in my talk with you today. But before looking into the future we must remember the past.

From my experience in the early seventies at Pacific Oaks College, it was clear that family day care was devalued, unsupported and not held in high esteem. I remember when I would speak of the wonderful potential of neighborhood-based child care, I was often asked if I really understood that what I was advocating would result in the lowering of standards. After all, the argument went, only "professionals" could provide quality care for children. The term babysitter was used to describe family day care; most of the "experts" in the field did not want to be associated with it, other than to try and change it into something that more resembled center care or nursery school.

At that time, there was little concern for supporting a system that worked well for hundreds of thousands of children and their families.

In those days family day care was treated like a third world country. It was viewed as backward, not technologically up-to-date and economically unsound.

But , what some viewed as backwardness, I and others viewed as family day care's strength. The fact that this was a service that could care for small groups of children in an intimate home setting has always seemed to me the way that children should be cared for. The center programs I most admire try to emulate family day care. It is true that as a system, it has never been one that accountants, economists and bookkeepers love to work with. It is not always neat and tidy; the debits, credits and bottom line items are not always of the greatest concern to providers. It wasn't family day care providers who installed the first computers in their homes to teach babies to read or to keep their ledgers straight, but if you wanted expertise in helping children develop and grow in an age-appropriate manner there was no better place to look than family day care.

It is also true that many providers were subsidizing the care of the families with whom they worked. Low wages and the general attitude that women and men doing this work were

doing it for "pin-money" was prevalent. As late as the mid-seventies part of the licensing process for family day care in California was to demonstrate that the provider had another source of income, to ensure that no one would care for children in order to earn a living and possibly exploit them. There was no question in my mind who was being exploited.

During the seventies many factions developed, as associations and family day care organizations were formed. This is a situation we find throughout the human services and is not unique to family day care. It has been said that if three child care advocates come together, there will be at least four opinions expressed. I think that part of the reason that we often find it so difficult to agree and work together is that we have had to work hard for very little, so that when there is some support, some money, some power, it is difficult to share. Organizationally, it is easier to act in a giving manner when giving has been practiced , it is easier to be cooperative if cooperative behavior has been experienced, and it is easier to deal with power when power has been shared.

As a reaction to the put-down of the seventies, the eighties began with a strong movement toward greater professionalism in family day care and I'm sure that this trend will continue. This movement has not only been for more status,

recognition and better pay, but also for more education and knowledge of child and family development. Professionalism is a double-edged sword and may be used in the short term for fast gains, but what about the long haul?

In exploring available models of professionalism there is a question as to their usefulness for family day care. I'll describe three that are familiar: 1) the medical-legal model or "Don't question me, I know best" ; 2) the sports model or "I can do anything better than you can" ; and 3) the organization model or "Stay with the system at any cost".

The medical-legal model is the most familiar. If we were to fashion ourselves after doctors and lawyers there would certainly be some rather seductive benefits that might be available. There would be the guarantee of a good income and godly status. Also there might be an assurance of being treated with great deference , but our liability insurance would be much higher if any was available. Using this model, the family day care provider might distance herself from the parents in her program, might charge them for any advice she gives and might require payment in advance. In addition, the caregiver would have been required to have at least three or four years of post graduate training and pass some rather stiff state boards. But with this, she could form herself into a corporation and probably get into any

restaurant in town. This does not seem to be an appropriate model.

The sports model is very seductive to young people in wonderful physical shape. The money is good for those at the very top in each field, but most who try to enter, fail. The educational requirements are minimal, but the odds of achieving success are very limited and the chance of having side effects from the use of steroids is great. This does not seem to be a model that works well for our purposes.

The organization model may be found in large corporations, or closer to home is the example of teachers in public schools. Entry into the field is pretty clear cut. The certification requirements and regulations are straightforward and structured. Creativity may be stifled because so much is proscribed, and children are tested and retested in order to maintain the accountability of the teacher. Teachers have put up a good fight for decent wages and benefits, as well as some decision-making in the classroom. But, based on recent reports, many leave the field burned-out , unappreciated and still at the low end of the status and pay scale. I doubt that this model offers anything to family day care that has not already been experienced.

Perhaps there is no appropriate model available for family day care professionals. It is a challenge for you to develop one that will work for the future. It will also be up to you to create and name this model. However, I would like to suggest some of the components of a model that would utilize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of family day care. It would include the following parts:

* It would be a profession which would attract generalists who care about working with children, their parents, their community and it would provide a variety of support systems that would enhance their work, their self esteem and their income.

* It would be a profession that would welcome diversity of cultures, races, and life styles for both men and women. Rather than trying to keep people out of the field, as many professions do, it would welcome people into the system as long as there is a demonstrated interest in working with and improving the lives of children and families. It would emphasize cooperation, not competition.

* It would be a profession that would want to work with other professions and fields of study and would initiate such collaboration. For example, I believe that child development specialists such as you, might gain some insights from discussions with anthropologists, architects,

demographers, economists, city planners, as well as pediatricians, nutritionists, nurse practitioners and lawyers in the public sector; and they would certainly gain from contact with you.

* It would be a profession that would provide its members with educational opportunities that are both challenging and yet suited to the kind of work performed. I have noted glimmerings of suitable course work designed by and for family day care providers, but in my experience, this is an area that still needs more exploration and requires objective analysis. I have always been a strong believer in experienced family day care providers teaching less experienced caregivers. Unquestionably providers should plan and develop the kind of courses, workshops, seminars that best meet their needs. However, I think that there should be a re-examination of how we teach, where we teach and who does the teaching. Some of the courses I have read about, seen and observed have been neither interesting, creative , informative nor readily accessible.

* It would be a profession that would develop people who would provide the needed leadership to speak out for the principles that have made family day care so vital and important to the children and families it serves. It would not be a profession that believes that bigger is better, but one that values the uniqueness of each child and creates an

intimate, safe and healthy environment in which small numbers of children can grow and develop.

* It would be a profession that would work closely with parents . Rather than viewing parents as clients, patients or customers, this professional would view parents as colleagues in the task of raising a generation of active, healthy, involved citizens.

In conclusion, I would like to admit that establishing a profession based on long term planning for cooperative and humanistic values will be difficult. For years family day care has been abused and to emulate the abusers is not a new phenomena. But what is being called for is a recognition that what is best about family day care must be retained: its diversity, its intimacy, its warmth, its caring, its knowledge of the human condition. <u>What works does not need fixing</u>: what doesn't work could be gently changed with sufficient honesty, support and backing. If we don't work toward these goals, we may have to remove the family from family day care and what we may have left may be more expedient, may be more efficient, may be more institutionalized, may be more popular with licensors, insurance executives, accountants and politicians; but it will lack the exquisite quality of an informal, neighborhood system that truly cares about the future and our children and our grandchildren.

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